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STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND INSURANCE

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Tennessee 911 Board: Quick Success With FCC Petition Regarding Discarded and Disconnected Cell Phones

NASHVILLE, TN—On April 11, 2008, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) granted a Petition filed by the Tennessee Emergency Communications Board (TECB) requesting an inquiry into the growing national problem of harassing and fraudulent 911 calls from discarded and disconnected cell phones. The petition enjoyed an unusual ride on the Commission's fast track, with approval coming less than two months after its February 14 filing.

Wireless devices at the heart of the issue, called non-initialized or NSI phones, may number in the millions. They can be difficult or impossible to trace because they are no longer served by a telecommunications carrier. NSI phones are being used in alarming numbers to disrupt 911 service, whether by accident or as a prank. Non-emergency calls from these phones can prevent anyone with a real emergency from connecting with a 911 call center and receiving immediate attention.

In its filing, the TECB asked the FCC to reexamine its call-forwarding rule and the ability of wireless carriers to block fraudulent 911 calls from these phones. Under current FCC mandate, all 911 calls from NSI phones must be forwarded to a 911 call center.

TECB chairman Randy Porter credited the petition's rapid turnaround to the importance of the issue, and to a diverse coalition of partners.

"Non-emergency calls from these phones are taking significant amounts of time at call centers across the country – critical time that should be going to people with real emergencies," said Porter. "We feel it's important to make sure we're doing what's best in how those phones are managed or regulated, and we're pleased that the FCC feels the same. We had some good people on board with us from all around the country, and I'm sure that helped in getting approval so quickly."

Joining the TECB in filing the petition with the FCC are the National Emergency Number Association, the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials-International, the National Association of State 911 Administrators, the Michigan State 911 Office, the New Jersey State 911 Commission, the Montana 911 Program, the Washington State E911 Program, the Snohomish County, Wash., Enhanced 911 Office, and Openwave Systems, Inc.

The Tennessee General Assembly increased the penalty for aggravated use of 911 for non-emergency calls during the 2007 session. For more information on the Tennessee Emergency Communications Board, visit www.tennessee.gov/commerce/911 or call 615-253-2164.

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